

Original Research Article

Socio-Economic Status of the Chepang Community in Nepal

Gopal Prasad Dhakal^{1*}, Usha Hamal², Naveen Prakash Adhikari²

¹M.Phil. Graduate at Pokhara University, Lecturer at Gurukul College, Chitwan

²M.Phil. Scholar at Institute of Advanced Communication, Education, and Research (IACER), Nepal

***Corresponding Author:** Gopal Prasad Dhakal

M.Phil. Graduate at Pokhara University, Lecturer at Gurukul College, Chitwan

Article History

Received: 29.01.2025

Accepted: 05.03.2025

Published: 08.03.2025

Abstract: This study examines the socio-economic status of the Chepang community in Ikchhakamana VDC, Chitwan District, Nepal, focusing on economic conditions, social and cultural activities, and challenges faced by this marginalized indigenous group. Despite government recognition, Chepangs remain economically and politically excluded, with limited access to education, healthcare, and employment opportunities. Addressing a significant research gap, this study employs a mixed-methods approach, integrating survey questionnaires, structured and unstructured interviews, and direct observation to analyze key socio-economic indicators such as income, landholding, literacy, occupation, and cultural identity. Data is analyzed both descriptively and statistically, using simple tabulations and percentage-based calculations. Findings reveal high poverty rates, low literacy levels (especially among women), early marriage prevalence, and persistent social discrimination. Additionally, traditional knowledge systems and cultural practices face threats of extinction due to modernization and external influences. The study emphasizes the need for targeted policy interventions, including educational and employment quotas, financial support for small enterprises, and participatory governance mechanisms to integrate Chepang voices in decision-making. The research highlights the importance of preserving Chepang cultural heritage while promoting sustainable economic development, offering insights for policymakers, researchers, and organizations working with indigenous communities in Nepal and beyond.

Keywords: Socio-Economic, Chepang, Marginalized, Recognition, Poverty.

INTRODUCTION

Nepal is small country with 147516 sq. km, remarkably diverse in flora and fauna due to its climatic and topographical variation. Because of the varied climatic conditions prevailing at different altitudes in Nepal, a very wide variety of species exists. Nepal is small landlocked south Asian country, which lies between India and China. The total area of Nepal is 147516 square kilometers. Nepal is labeled as one of the least developed countries where “about 25.2 per cent of the total population live below poverty line” and “literacy rate for the year 2011 is 65.9 per cent” (Central Bureau of Statistics, Statistical Year Book of Nepal, 2019, p. xiv).

Nepal is not only rich in natural resources and scenic beauty but also has the people belonging to various tribes and ethnic groups speaking different languages and following various religions. Nepal is declared as a multilingual, multicultural, multiracial, and multi-religious country (Constitution of Nepal, 2015). Some of the ethnic groups include Magar, Gurung, Rai, Limbu, Tharu, Chepang, etc. Nepal embodying great physiographic diversity and biodiversity is also rich in the cultural and ethnic diversity. Nepal is a home to 23 million people, which comprises numerous multi-ethnic, multilingual and multi-religious groups. Government of Nepal has identified and recognized 59 indigenous Nationalities of Nepal through the enactment of the National Foundation for Development of Indigenous Nationalities Act, 2002. Nepal Federation of Indigenous Nationalities (NEFIN) 2004 has further classified the 59 Janajatis (ethnic people) into five groups comprising of endangered, highly marginalized, marginalized, disadvantaged and advanced group. Among the several ethnic groups, the Chepangs, occupying 0.23 per cent of total population (CBS, 2001) is one of the highly marginalized groups living on the hilly and steeper slopes of Chitwan, Dhading, Makawanpur and Gorkha districts of Nepal. “Nepal is

Copyright © 2025 The Author(s): This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY-NC 4.0) which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium for non-commercial use provided the original author and source are credited.

CITATION: Gopal Prasad Dhakal, Usha Hamal, Naveen Prakash Adhikari (2025). Socio-Economic Status of the Chepang Community in Nepal. *South Asian Res J Human Soc Sci*, 7(2): 51-61.

garden of four casts and thirty-six sub casts” remarked by the king, Prithivi Naryan Shah long ago. When the people divide as accordance with them with their castes, they definitely have different traits and qualities on the ground of their castes. Our country, Nepal is a country of unity within diversity. In this light, Chepang people are also not the exception of it. Biological resources and associated traditional knowledge play a vital role in the livelihood of rural people. It is linked with food security, human health and the environment. Majority of rural people depend upon these resources for their livelihoods.

There are more than 50 ethnic groups of people in Nepal. Chepangs are among the least known of Nepal’s indigenous people. Ordinarily, Chepangs are considered as a forest dwelling tribal community but slowly emerged as simple agriculture-com-food gathering household maintaining people. “The Chepang is one of the indigenous nationalities of Nepal have changed their lifestyle in short span of time” (Adhikari, 2023, p. 22). Ignorant and innocent, they are exploited by the so-called upper caste people. However, despite rampant poverty and backwardness, they are undergoing some changes. Backward communities display a lot of mysterious things to many people. For researchers, the backward community can be a good experimental group to compare the social aspects vis-à-vis the other communities including the elite’s groups. Similarly, for a policy maker, the backward communities display a lot of constraints in designing a generic policy. These groups need special attention since they are very sensitive to change of any kind. It is a matter of fact that backward communities are very fragile and need special attention. If they are not taken care of properly, they will disperse and might come into verge of extinction. It is also known that there is almost no representation of Chepangs in government and other apparatus. In addition, there is a big gap in the distribution of social justice between the indigenous and non-indigenous group.

The overall objectives of the study are to assess the present socio-economic study of the Chepangs of Ikchhakamana VDC of Chitwan district. The specific objectives are:

1. To find out the economic condition of Chepang community.
2. To analyze the social and cultural activities of Chepang community.

The socio-economic study of each ethnic group of Nepal is most important factor for introducing Nepal to the world Systematic plans and programmed to uplift the stander of living of Chepang People require a clear understanding of their number distribution in different part of the country including their behaviors. This study focuses on finding economic characteristics of Chepangs of Ikchhakamana VDC, and to provide valuable information to prepare plans and program to uplift their standard of living. Chepangs are one of the weaker and marginalized sections of Nepal. It is well observed that the Chepang community is a self-contained social unit and comparative identity and isolation from mainstream of Nepalese society has enabled them to be away from the process of development.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Many anthropologists and social scientists have carried out research on Chepangs. But there is unique idea about them. Chepangs are the inhabitant in the remote and sparse contours, outback and rolling precipices of the districts of Makwanpur, Chitwan, Gorkha and Dhading. One legend from eastern Nepal claims the Chepangs along with the Hayes Sunuwars are the descendants of Suacchhap, one of the ten sons of Kirathangba, ancestors of Kirat people.

The earliest known work on Chepangs is that of B.H. Hodgson, a former British resident in Nepal, who carried out a considerable number of investigations on the non Indo-Aryan languages of the Indian subcontinent. His first paper, on “Chepang and Kusunda Tribes of Nepal, 1884” shows the physical and linguistic affinity between the Chepangs and other groups of the region. He hypothesized that their wretched condition, physical and moral, is the result not of inherent defect, but of that savage ferocity of stronger races which broke to pieces and out law. He writes “Chepang still rely more on food hunting and gathering than on agriculture. They expect more from their bows and arrows than from plough. To earn money, to make a proper house and to wear clean clothes and to acquire education are things which are out of the thought of the Chepang” (1857). In 1967, Dor Bahadur Bista states, “some of the Chepangs believe that their community is an offshoot of the Kirant (Rai-Limbu) group that came from Sunthali, Dolakha in the east. Some Chepangs believe that the Thami, Pahari and Chepangs are descendants of the ancestors. Some of the Chepangs call themselves “the lords of the land” (Hami, Jimi Thami, Bhumi Haun). Although some Chepangs claim their ancestors come from eastern Nepal. Most of them believe that they originated from the stone of the Mahabharat mountain range. According to Bista, in his book *People of Nepal* 1967 Chepangs are distinguished in two grounds- one purely relying in agricultural economy and other still depending upon food hunting, gathering and fishing. The former groups lives in the hunting and fishing. The former group lives in the eastern part and is known as “Pukunthali” and the other live in western part and is known “Kachhare”. Kachhare Chepangs are more backward and primitive than Pukunthalis. The Kachhare liked to be called “Sunpraja” and have no subdivisions, while Pukunthalies are called “Praja” and have number of exogamous clans.

D.B. Bista (1967, p. 91-92) quotes “One of the popular Chepangs legends states that “Both Lhahri (Lava) and Kushari (Kush) were the sons of sitaji (Ramayan). One day both Lahari and Kusahari, who were very good at archery,

decided to test themselves who was better between them. Whoever lost the competition would have to migrate to the west of the Narayani River and never be seen again. Lahari won the competition and since then Kushari had to migrate to the Narayani River. After that, they remained behaved as enemies.” Likewise, they were natural enemies of each other. The descendants of Lahari were called Chepangs and Kushari, the Kusundda.

According to Bista in his book *People of Nepal* (1967), highlights Chepangs from the point of view of socio-cultural settings. He has also made an attempt to bring them to light through the journal “Nepal Digest” (1972), giving some details on their origin, beliefs, customs and their economic life (Bista, 1972). A letter of King Prithivi Narayan Shah to Bhagawant Nath, dated 1770, mentions the caste Kushari (Pant: 1968-1969). From then, the term has come in use for over centuries. Some Tamangs in the area also claimed to be descendants of Lava (Lahari). In the book *Ethnic Groups of Nepal and their ways of Living* by D.B. Shrestha and C.B. Singh, the authors have attempted to give a brief introduction of Chepangs of Lothar Khola and Ikchhakamana VDC.

In 1879, another scholars Forbes wrote that this affinity held for “nearly the cognate dialects of Tibet, Nepal and higher Asia and not especially for Chepangs. He concluded that in the early period, the whole sub-Himalayan region was occupied by tribes allied to the Chepangs and Arenac mountaineers, who were cut in to pieces and driven out of central Nepal by the incursion to 1300 years ago, which is the date Hodgson assigns to event” (Forbes 1878, p. 218- 220)

The Praja Development Program Bulletin (1983) is also a helpful document for the scholars who wish to study on Chepangs. It gives some information about their poverty and belief in superstitions and welfare programs launched by the government. The study carried out by CEDA, Tribhuvan University on “Chepang Jatiko Samajik Sammunati Sarvechhayan” 1975, is a significant contribution on the study of Chepangs in Nepal. The research work has emphasized their socio- economic characteristics. In *The Chepangs: A Study in Continuity and Change*, G. M. Gurung (1989) writes that Chepangs’ unique traditions and cultures are blended with Hinduism. He examined Chepangs, society, culture, lifestyle, historical interpretation, ethnic identity, physical features, food habits. Clothing, festivals, clan organization and their occupation.

Chepang Jati Ek Parichaya written by Bhojraj Thapaliya also made an attempt to give an ethnographic picture of Chepang community of Nepal. He has described different aspects of their life, origin, organization pre-history and socio-cultural condition. “Chepangharu Sanga KehiDin” (Madhuparka September-October 1942, vol. 7 No.5p.75), by Biswabandhu Thapa is a study on the Chepang of Chitwan, Chitwan, Dhading and Gorkha. He has described the population of Chepangs, geographical setting, their homelands occupation, historical origin, economic condition and marriage system in the Chepang community but he has not talked about socio-cultural changes of their life.

METHODOLOGY

The research is descriptive and explanatory in nature. The study has assessed the overall status of the Chepangs of Ikchhakamana VDC, Chitwan. Interviews were taken with the selected samples of the elderly. An attempt was also made to look into their problems through interactions, and observations. The random sampling method was adopted to select the respondents, who were asked semi- structured questions to find their literacy level, age, sex, marital status and the major reasons for their displacements. The findings taken from the research were interpreted, and recommendations were made accordingly Research Design.

Research Design is the plan structure and strategy of investigation to obtain answers to research questions. Research design is the conceptual structure within which research is conducted. This study attempts to identify the demographic and socioeconomic characteristics of Chepangs and suggest measures for their sound upliftment. This study is based on descriptive and exploratory research design. Data and information are collected through field surveys in the VDC, and they are analyzed to get the answer to the research questions. For this study data was collected through questionnaires from local people, teachers, local leaders and village head. The data collected through questionnaire were classified and tabulated according to the needs of the research.

Rationale for the Study Area

The socio-economic status represents the living condition of particular community. Chepang is an indigenous and one of the Chepangs are mainly distributed mainly in Makawanpur, Chitwan, Dhading, Gorkha and Tanahun district of Nepal. Among the district Chitwan is the main district where the Chepangs reside in. Ikchhakamana VDC is one of the VDC of Chitwan district. It is good to note that a significant number of Chepangs reside in this village. Plethora of macro level studies on Chepangs have been found. The present study is very much important in the context of Nepal, because it is a real challenge and a call that they should be include in the mainstream of Nepalese society and carried into a subtle silken thread of nationalism. In this regard, the present study focuses on the present scenario of socio-economic characteristics of the Chepangs of Ikchhakamana VDC of Chitwan district.

To find the above-mentioned objectives. Both primary and secondary data were collected primary data was collected from the household survey, key information, interview and observation and secondary data was collected from the different related materials, books, literature, reports, articles journals and information of Ikchhakamana VDC.

Various published and unpublished secondary data were also considered to supplement the data from primary sources. Related journals, books, reports, unpublished records, and these were consulted. Nepal Chepang Sangh, Chitwan (NCS) provided data about population distribution, VDCs distribution, land use patterns, geographical information etc. For the supplement of information, many concerned organizations like CEDA, CBS, Central library (TU), PLAN, and NCS were visited.

Primary data was collected through the household survey with the help of pre- tested semi-structured interview schedule. Primary sources include interviews, questionnaires, observations, or experiments. Information was also collected through various participatory rural appraisal (PRA) Chitwan district is diverse in caste and ethnic composition as all four castes and several ethnic groups reside over here. Chepang ethnic groups in the district practice shifting cultivation and some Dalits depend on forest for charcoal for subsistence through their traditional occupation.

Universes and Sample

The area, which was selected for this study, is Ikchhakamana VDC of Chitwan district. The total household in the VDC is 315 and the total population is 2093. The total household of Chepang in the VDC is 160 and the total population is 942. The total household of the Chepangs, only 105 Chepangs members were taken as the sample of the study. Sample units are selected randomly. A questionnaire was administered to receive information's on their socio-economic status, observation was also made for collecting information on other aspects not covered by interview, though the universe was relatively small with a smaller number of inhabitants. A structured and unstructured questionnaire was used to collect data on the basis in terms of personal identification and population structure, occupation, landholding, education and family size etc. The respondents were interviewed with the help of a semi-structured questionnaire.

Observation

Research involved the observation to record the different information related to problems and prospects of socio-economic condition of Chepang community in the Chitwan district. To accomplish this task, both participant and quasi-participant, observation was used. During this period of observation, the value of their cultural identity was sincerely observed. In the observation period the study was based on the observation of costumes, feasts and festivals, rituals and other scary sites.

The respondents were observed with the help of a semi-structured checklist. Observation was an important technique to draw inferences regarding the overall status and living condition of the Chepangs of Ikchhakamana VDC, Chitwan. All the amenities concerned at the home were studied to make a candid assessment of their situation. Direct participation with the local people to study their settlement patterns, sanitation, land types, livestock, cropping pattern, source of water drinking and irrigation and festivals celebrations were carefully observed, so much to record the exact condition of the village life.

Method of Data Analysis

In this study, the data has been analyzed both descriptively and statistically. After collecting various data, the data were manually processed with simple tabulation. Information, obtained on geographical setting of the village, housing conditions, sanitation family structure, has been descriptively analyzed. Information on marriage, kinship, education status, population composition, food habits dress patterns, lifestyle, income and expenditure have descriptively and statistically analyzed. The statistical tools and techniques used in the study are very simple. Most of the data have been calculated and tabulated on a simple percentage basis.

Geographical Setting

The headquarters of the Ichchakamana rural municipality is located at Kurintar, Chitwan district, Bagmati Pradesh of Nepal. Ichchakamana Gaupalika is a rural municipality and local government of Nepal. It was incorporated in 2017 and provides various local government services through the 7 wards offices. Ichchakamana Municipality, Chitwan provides government services such as Health and Population, social security, tax collection, Forestry, Vital Registration (Birth, Death, Marriage, Migration, and Divorce), Agricultural and Livestock Development, education (Basic and Secondary), Youth and Sports, local-level development projects, Communication and Information Technology, land registration, Social

Welfare distribution, Science and Technology, finest utilization of local resources, land registration, urban planning, transportations, Water Resource and Irrigation, etc.

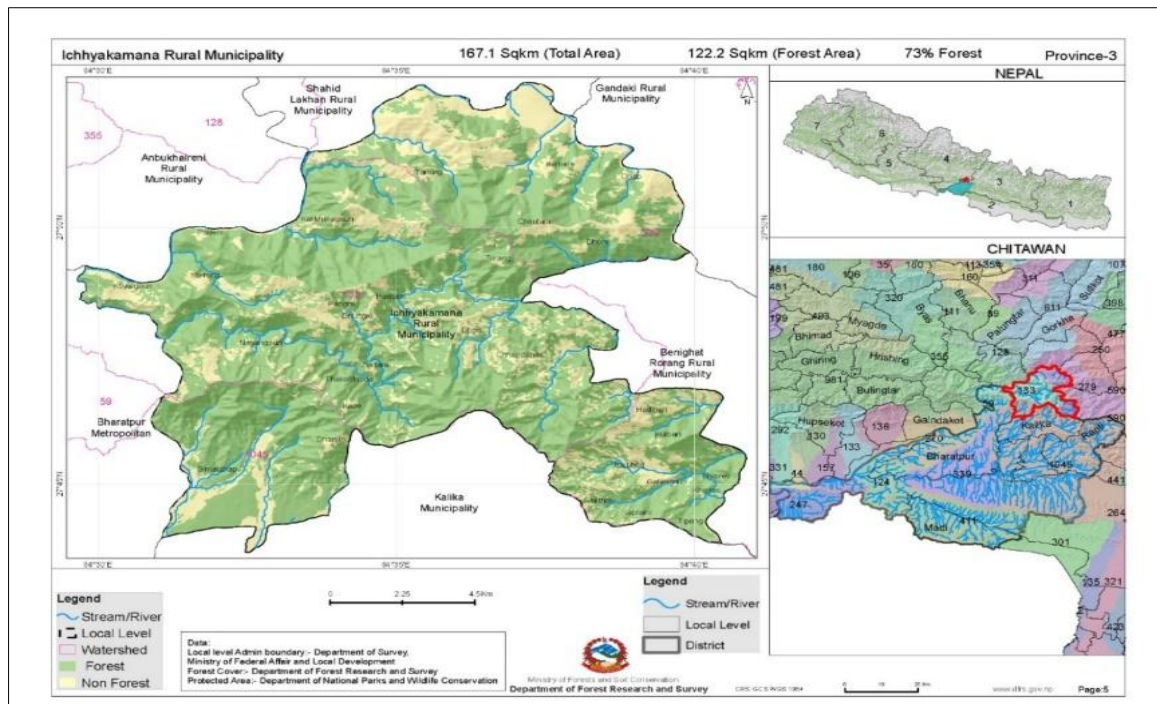


Figure 1: Map of Chitwan (Source: District Development Committee (DDC))

The headquarters of the Ichchakamana rural municipality is located at Kurintar, Chitwan district, Bagmati Pradesh of Nepal. Ichchakamana Gaupalika is a rural municipality and local government of Nepal. It was incorporated in 2017 and provides various local government services through the 7 wards offices.

Ichchakamana Municipality, Chitwan provides government services such as Health and Population, social security, tax collection, Forestry, Vital Registration (Birth, Death, Marriage, Migration, and Divorce), Agricultural and Livestock Development, education (Basic and Secondary), Youth and Sports, local-level development projects, Communication and Information Technology, land registration, Social Welfare distribution, Science and Technology, finest utilization of local resources, land registration, urban planning, transportations, Water Resource and Irrigation, etc.

Housing Pattern

The Chepang residential pattern and the types of houses are traditional; some houses are made of wood, and some are made of stone. This is because Chepangs, including other indigenous people are highly reliant on natural resources and traditional livelihood patterns. They want to keep their traditional ways of life intact (Rai *et al.*, 2022). Most of the roofs of the houses are made with thatch. The Chepang houses are small and narrow. The houses are two stored and the house has no separate rooms. one stored make one room. They use the upper one for their bedroom and the low is used for the kitchen. The size of the Chepangs house is 5 to 7 meters long and 4 to 5 meters wide on average. The rooves being conical. Most of the designs of the house are built in rectangular size. The door is in the middle of the front wall. The windows are also in the middle of the front wall or on any side of the wall of the stonewall house. But wooden houses have no windows. The front side of the house attaches the verandah. Verandah is very useful for the guest and their daily functional life. The front of the house has also a courtyard. It is very important for their cultural activities. Some Chepangs are keeping their animals on the side of verandha. Their house is very rough and dirty because they don't clean the house daily. Chepangs scrub the house only in the function. They are painting their house's walls with the red mud in the festivals.

Data Analysis and Presentation Social Characteristics of the Respondents

It is essential to know some demographic and socio-economic status of Chepang community. This Chapter mainly deals with some important demographic characteristics such as literacy status, educational attainment occupations, size of land holding, cause of migration, income level and other economic characteristics of respondents.

As the family is the principal productive unit, it is also the sole source of labor supply. Though all the family members contribute to subsistence and commercial aspects, the age of the population was categorized into three age categories in the study area. The economically active population was considered the members of age 15 to 59 years. Though

the members with 42age below 15 and above 59 years also have the supportive role in the economic activities of the family, they were not considered as economically active members. Out of the 810 total populations of the sampled households, the study revealed that majority of the population (50.63 percent) was of economically active age. Overall, 50.86 percent of the sampled population was male, and 49.15 percent of population was male. The study revealed male population higher in all age group except group of age below 15years.

Table 1: Population Distribution by Age Group and Gender

Age Size	Male		Female		Total	
	No	%	No	%	No	%
20-25	20	33.33	10	25	30	30
25-30	13	16.66	10	25	23	20
30-35	4	6.66	6	10	10	8
35-40	14	23.33	6	15	20	20
40-45	7	11.66	8	20	15	15
45-50	5	8.33	2	5	7	7
Total	63	100%	42	100%	105	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2022

Structure of Family

In the context of the Chepang family, it consists of a group of people who are related by blood. In the observation of the present researcher, the male members are generally grandfather, father, father’s brother, father’s siblings, and father’s son and so on. On the other hand, the female members of the family are grandmother, mother, father’s unmarried sister and wives of the sons. The family structures are of both nuclear and joint type. The concept of nuclear family is alien to them and is not the same as it is to the westerners. However, in general practice families are divided into two broad categories popularly known as nuclear and joint families. Joint family is a main sociological phenomenon in Nepalese society. This is unaffected by caste or ethnicity, religion, language, occupation and urbanization. Nuclear family is defined as a group consisting of a husband, his wife and their unmarried siblings living together. The nuclear family has become an ideal norm for a long time. Some Chepangs live in a joint family. The Chepang society is a paltry liner society. Father is the head of the family. After elder brother’s death, family responsibility is transferred to his wife in the absence of his other brother. Most of the families consist of husband, wife and their siblings. Such families are found among the Chepangs with good economic status, while poor Chepangs live in joint families.

Most of the young Chepangs are found living separate from their families immediately after they get married. This is because they want to live in a peaceful atmosphere. They do not want to take up the whole burden of the joint family. They think that a huge joint family becomes a great burden for women. The practice of dowry is also prevalent in the Chepang community. As their traditional culture, the Chepangs give their married daughters a piece of land or a tree of *Chyuri* (butter tree). Unmarried children continue to work as laborers and collect money for themselves.

The relationship between father, son, mother, children, sister, daughter and other members of the household are interdependent in their family affairs. The father consults with his son on domestic affairs when the latter is below 16 years old. The mother protects her children from unfavorable condition of the household until they are married. The Chepang live as extended family units, often with three generations living in the same house. If a family has many sons, or if a son has many wives, the men will live separately with their wives and children. The family structure is patrilineal (line of descent traced through the males) and predominantly patriarchal (male dominated), but the mother plays an important social role.

Table 2: Family Type of Chepang in Ikchhakamana VDC

Family Type	Household Number	Percentage
Nuclear	31	64.58%
Joint	17	35.42%
Total	48	100.00%

Source: Field Survey, 2022

Educational Status of the Respondents

Less than 15 percent Chepangs are literate and almost 90 percent of them are leading life under utter poverty. These days, there are some projects running for Chepangs, but they are not becoming really effective so far. School enrollment ratio of school going children is still very low and dropout rate is very high. The census 2001 has revealed that the population of Chepangs is 52,237. Education is one of the important human capitals, which plays an important role in

determining household status in society. It is the main factor of socio-cultural and economic change in society. Without education people's attitude, knowledge cannot be developed and so do with society.

Table 3: Distribution of respondents by educational status

Education	Rich	Medium	Poor	Total
Illiterate	9(35.7)	8(25.0)	25(42.4)	42(40)
Primary level	5(64.3)	17(53.1)	27(45.8)	49(46.66)
Up to SLC	-	6(18.8)	7(11.9)	13(12.39)
Higher Education	-	1(3.1)	-	1(0.95)
Total	14(100)	32(100)	59(100)	105(100)

Source: Field Survey, 2022

Occupational Status of Households

For over a thousand years, the Chepangs lived in very poor conditions. In the 20th century, their quality of life began to improve due to the development of progressive agricultural techniques. Before they began to settle in villages, the Chepangs led a nomadic life, doing some fishing and hunting. Today, they live in sheds made of tree branches and cultivate crops such as maize and millet. They still have customs akin to nomadic life, such as using traps to catch birds and gathering various forest products. Occupation structure reflects the nature of local economy and various commercial and employment opportunities of the people of the area.

Table 4: Major Occupation of Respondents

Occupation	Number of Respondents	%
Agriculture	29	28
Hunting	25	24
Labors	23	22
Business	11	10
Govt. job	1	1
Pvt. Job	9	8
Student	7	7
Total	105	100

Source: Field Survey, 2022

Table 5: Distribution of Respondents by Occupation

Occupation	Frequency	Percentage
Farming	79	75.2
Farming + wage laboring	16	15.2
Farming + Service	5	4.8
Farming + Business	5	4.8
Total	105	100

Source: Field Survey, 2022. Note: Farming: Crop, Livestock Service: Governmental job, non-governmental job Business: Shopkeeper, Home stay Wage laboring: payments for work performed

Table 6: Distribution of Respondents by Monthly Income

Income size	No of Respondents	Total	
		No.	%
1500-2000	29	28	28
2000-2500	23	22	22
2500-3000	21	20	20
3000-3500	20	19	19
3500-4000	12	11	11
Total	105	100	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2022

Landholding Size

Land is the important component of any farming system, which needs investment of labor and seeds to yield a product. Land ownership within the agrarian economy of the study area provides a major source of income, which is an important natural asset that farmers have. The three major types of agricultural land owned by households in the study area are; *khet* consisting leveled terraces (with bunds to hold water) on which paddy and wheat can be grown, *pakhobari* is the dry land which consists of out-sloped, rain-fed terraces where paddy can not be grown but crops like maize, millet and

other vegetables are commonly grown, and the *khoriya* (slash and burn) where clearing small patches of forest for one season's harvest before allowing it to revert back to the forest practice is done. Such unproductive land is set aside for producing buckwheat, broom grass, bamboo and other species.

Table 7: Distribution of Respondents by Land holding (cultivated / uncultivated)

Landholding in Ropani	Cultivate		Uncultivated		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
10-20	17	26.66	11	25	28	26
20-30	20	33.33	15	37.05	35	35
30-40	10	13.33	4	15	14	12
40-50	9	15	6	15	15	15
Above 50	7	11.66	6	12.05	13	12
Total	73	100%	32	100%	105	100

Hierarchy

Chepangs have hierarchical system among themselves. They have some divisions and sub-division in the community as Sunpraja, Dutpraja and Ghartipraja. Sunpraja is considered as the highest among them and Ghartipraja is the lowest in their community. Dutpraja is lower than Sunpraja but higher than Ghartipraja. They have restrictions on the food of higher castes and the food touched by the lower caste is considered untouchable. However, with the rapid growth of modernization and the awareness programs launched by various organizations in their locality, the system of hierarchy gradually disappears. Chepangs have no economic clans or groups. Nevertheless, some kind of hierarchy among them in society is seen sometimes.

Life - Cycle and Changes

Human life is not normal. Birth and death are natural phenomena in every community of any society. Every ethnic group has its own philosophy of life and death, human relationship, importance and their social activities as well as the life cycle. Such ceremonial activities of life cycle are not an exception to change and modification, but cultural contact and dominance of majority groups gradually bring change over minority groups. Birth, marriage and death are most important events of individual life. All communities have almost all such occasions celebrating and conducting special ceremonies. Chepang communities are not freer from this phenomenon. They have their unique ceremonies during birth, marriage and death.

Dress Pattern

The Chepang forefather wears traditional dress. The male Chepangs use the changa and the female use Panga is colorful cloth, but Changa is non-color cloth. The male Chepang wear dhoti. (languthi or loin cloth) bhoto, daura, kachhad, pheta of changa's and female Chepangs wear sari, cholo, patuka and ghalek of panga. The poor male Chepangs didn't wear any cloth on the upper part of the body. They only cover the low part of the body, they covered only the breath by loin cloth. They strolled on bare feet.

In the Ikchhakamana area, a few oldest Chepangs are wearing their traditional dress but most of the Chepang are wear modern dress as the Brahman Kshetry. They wear shirt, pain slipper. Shoes, cap, vest, etc. the female wear sari, blouse, petticoat, bodice, bracers, slippers and macis, the schoolgirls wear shirt frock and ribbon etc.

Consideration of Indigenous People in Mountain Areas

The term 'indigenous' has been debated and is contested is South Asia where, except for Nepal which recognizes 'Janjati's', few countries accord the term legitimacy, referring to such groups variously as tribal, ethnic minority, among others and arguing that the term indigenous finds its origin in American and Australian history in the context of migration. The debate over terminology has been complicated by the struggles of indigenous groups in the region, articulated as demands for self- determination, and perceived as a threat to the unity of nation- states. Determination is often only an articulation of their need for greater voice and autonomy in governance and decision-making rather than a desire to secede from the nation- state.

Although state have recognized indigenous people through a different terminology - and it is important to acknowledge that progressive programmers and policies have been put into place these groups- the assessment finds these communities to continue to be marginalized from the economic and political mainstream, where the integrated face a threat of cultural extinction.

It is important to consider indigenous people in mountain areas for two reasons, which subsume several issues:

First, many mountains region are sites of intense conflicts structured around issues of ethnicity. What are the deeper structural causes of these conflicts? Areas inhabited by indigenous people continue to be poorer relatively, and he

attitudes of mainstream society towards the indigenous person are still predominantly pejorative. Land alienation, displacement, and natural resource policies that discourage traditional practices without a provision of alternatives are some of the reasons for their persistent poverty. These in turn are linked to the lack of voice of indigenous people in decisions peace and harmony in mountain areas issues cannot be ignored.

Second, mountain areas are rich not just in diversity of cultural groups and indigenous people but also in biological diversity. The destruction and extinction of each is inextricably linked with the other. If mountain areas are to be valued for the diverse ecological services they provide to the plains, it is necessary to preserve the stakes of people who inhabit these areas. Market incentives are just not enough. The identity of indigenous people is embedded in their relationship to their land and resources, with traditional knowledge playing an important role in environmental conservation. To that extent, the fate of mountains is deeply entwined with that of people who inhabit them- many of whom are indigenous.

It is essential to know some demographic and socio-economic status of the study Chepang community. This chapter mainly deals with some important demographic characteristics such as age-sex structure, marital status, age dependency and family size. It also provides analysis of socio-economic characteristics such as literacy status, educational attainment, occupation, size of land holding, number of cattle holding, cause of migration, income level and other economic characteristics of respondents.

CONCLUSION

It can be concluded that with the passage of time, Chepang of Ikchhakamana VDC of Chitwan district were found improving themselves and developing relationship with other people and have been living in the society. The influence of modernization has less effect on their lives. Very few of Chepangs were found literate in the field. Political participation of the community is also poor. There lies abject poverty among them. Still, they rely on wild food to make their hand to mouth. The census 2001 has revealed that the population of Chepang is 52,237 Chepangs, who live in the central regions of Nepal, are also known as the Chepangs have their own language, which belongs to the Tibeto- Burman family. According to Schafer and Toba, the Chepang language is close to the language of Thami and hayu (Dhungel, Bs 2051:42). The naming ceremony among the Chepangs takes place nine days after the birth of the child. During the ceremony the Chepang shaman (pande) reads sacred texts over a cock, a hen, thread coloured with turmeric, thin roti made of maize flour, total flower, egg, etc. and takes them outside for worship. The child and its mother are tied with the thread and the child is given a name. Alcohol is required during marriage. The boy's side must obtain the consent of the girl's side before or after marriage. A special ceremony must be carried out when the bride is brought and enters the groom's house. The Chepangs like to get married within their own community. In the Chemang community, a son-in-law is supposed to live in his father-in-law's house.

The Chepangs mostly bury their dead bodies. The dead body is bathed, and new clothes and garlands of flowers are put on the body and wrapped with burial cloth. A box is made of the barks of sal, in which the dead body is kept and buried. Chepangs are of two types, vizpukunthale and kachhare. The kiptat system in the past. They are considered a little more knowledgeable and adopt in Chepang society. The kachhare are ordinary Chepangs. Majority of the respondents were found married at an early age. Similarly, the education level of the respondents was also found very low. Only about 64.28% of the male respondents were also found very low. Only about 64.28% of the male respondents were illiterate followed by 83.33% female. Similarly, about 35.72% of the male respondents were literate followed by 16.66% females. Majority of the respondents were found holding agriculture as their major occupation. While assessing the religion of the respondents, about 49% of the respondents were found Hindus, 31% Buddhist and the rest 20% Christians. They were found living with a meager income. Very few of the respondents had knowledge of family planning awareness. Similarly, majority of the respondents were found discriminated by the elites, the people of higher caste and some of them were found discriminated on charge of untouchability. Very few of the respondents were found holding sufficient land for food production. The food produced in their land is not sufficient to run their livelihood even for the period of half a year. Chonam, Dashain, Tihar, Maghessankrati, and Saunesankrati are the major festivals that are celebrated by the Chepangs.

RECOMMENDATIONS

As per the findings and observation of the researcher, the following recommendations are forwarded to overcome the problems of Chepangs and increase their living standard.

- Their indigenous settlement must be protected and secured. Special measures must be adopted by the government to control the outmigration of the Chepangs
- Special quotas should be allotted for Chepangs in the sector like education, health, job, etc. to increase their living

- standard and broaden their outlook,
- Provision of easy access to loans for running cottage industries should be made available
- Action oriented NGOs rather than income oriented should be allowed to operate their activities in the region.
- Ensure mechanism of social integration through cross-cultural exchange.
- The unique culture of Chepangs is on the verge of extinction. Hence, special programs should be launched in the area for the protection of their unique cultural and tradition.
- Chepangs are still not consulted in the decision-making process at the local and national level. Hence, their participation is essential to make any program related to them success.
- Participatory management approach should be applied in the study site make any program related to Chepangs a sustainable and durable one.

Limitation of the Study

Each and every study has its own limitations. This study aims to focus the socio-economic status of Chepang community in Ikchhakamana VDC. It is a micro study, which attempts to explore the socio economic study of Chepang of Ikchhakamana. It cannot comprehend the macro view of the socio-economic status of the Chepangs because the socio-economic condition of the Chepang is vague and this study reflects some of the varieties of socio-economic status.

This study is limited only in Ikchhakamana VDC. This may not reflect the socio- economic status of the whole Chepang community of Nepal. All the information in this study has been based on the data collected by the researcher.

REFERENCES

- Adhikari, G. C. (1977). *Chepang Jatiko Vikas Ek Dristikon*. Panchyat Darpan, 8, Panchayat Training Center Jawalakhel.
- Adhikari, G.C. (1979). *Prajaharuko Samajik Arthik Bastuisthiti*. Janakpur.
- Adhikari, R. (2023). Life of the Chepang now and then: A Study of Chitwan District. *Nepal Journal of Multidisciplinary Research*, 6(1), 22–31. <https://doi.org/10.3126/njmr.v6i1.54283>
- Adhikari, S. M. (1979). *Chitwanka Chepang Jati*, Virendra Multiple Campus.
- Baiju, D. B. (1977). *ChepangJ atiko Vikas*, Panchayat Darpan, 1, Panchayat Training Centre Jawalakhel.
- Bista, D. B. (1964). *Filed Trip Report to Chepang Area of Dhading*, August 21 to 30, U.S. Aid Nepal.
- Bista, D. B. (1967). *People of Nepal*. Kathmandu Ratna Pustak Bhandar.
- Bista, D. B. (1971-1972). *Chepang Nepal Digest*. Kathmandu (December-Jun)
- Central Bureau of Statistics. (2012). National Population and Housing Census 2011 (National Report). Government of Nepal, National Planning Commission Secretariat, <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/sources/census/wphc/Nepal/Nepal-Census-2011-Voll.pdf>.
- Dhungel, R. M. (1995). *Chepang Samudayara Sanskriti*. Bhaktapur.
- Gurung G. M. (1987). *Religions, Beliefs and Practices among the Chepang of Nepal, Contribution to Nepalese Studies*, 3.
- Gurung G. M. (1989). *The Chepangs: A Study in Continuity and Change*. Kathmandu.
- Gurung G. M. (1994). *Indigenous People, Mobilization and Change*. Kathmandu.
- Gurung G. M. (1995). *Report from a Chepang Village*, S. Gurung. Kathmandu.
- Gurung, G.M. (1982). *Modernization of Economy in a Chepang Village of Nepal*.
- Hodgson, B. H. (1848). On the Chepang and Kusunda Tribe of Nepal. *Journal of Asiatic Society of Bengal*: vol. xvii, p. ii 1848, *Literature and Religion of Nepal and Tibet*. Ptt. Ii 1953
- Mishra, R. R. (1079). *Prajaharuko Samajik Arthik Bastuisthiti*. Janakpur.
- Neupane, K. P. (1984). *Chepang Sanskritiko Samaj Ek Parichya*. Kathmandu.
- Panta, D. P. (1979). *Praja Jatiko Vikas Aajako Awasuakta*. Madhuparka-7.
- Rai, N. K. (1974). *Chepang Jatiko Ek Parichya*. Panchyat Darpan.
- Rai, N. K. (1984). *People of The Stones: the Chepangs of Center Nepal*, Kathmandu. CNAS.
- Rai, N. K., & Chaudhari, T. (1975). *Chepang Jatiko Samajik Arthik Sammunati Survchyan*. SEDA, Kirtipur.
- Rai, S., Dahal, B., & Anup, K. C. (2022). Climate change perceptions and adaptations by indigenous Chepang community of Dhading, Nepal. *GeoJournal*, 87(6), 5327-5342. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10708-022-10577-9>
- Sharma, N. (1967). *Nepali Janajivan*, Kathmandu. Shaja Prakashan.
- Sherma, A. B. (2025). The Subtlety of Hegemonic Masculinity in Nepali Films through Digital Platforms: A Critique of the Film *Saino*. *SCHOLARS: Journal of Arts & Humanities*, 7(1), 94–110. <https://doi.org/10.3126/sjah.v7i1.75681>
- Sovit, P. (1992). *Happiness in Wilderness: The Chepang*. The Blueryans Publication, Kathmandu.
- Thapa, B. B. (1975). *A Few Days with the Chepangs*, Madhuparka-5.
- Thapa, M. (2024). “Unveiling Displacement: Examining Refugee Suffering in Dave Eggers’ *what is the what*.” *Praxis International Journal of Social Science and Literature*, 7(11), <https://doi.10.51879/PIJSSL/07011>
- Thapa, T. (1987). *Hami Chepang*, Hetauda Narayani Anchal Nepal.

- Thapaliya, B. J. (1987). *Chepang Jati Ek Parichya*, Dharan Koshi Anchal Nepal.
- The Constitution of Nepal. (2015). Kathmandu: Government of Nepal.
- Varya, T. V. (1972). The Chepangs. *The Rising Nepal* (July 14, Friday). www.nefin.org.np
<http://nefin.org.np/content/view/34/42>